

VZCZCXRO2433
OO RUEHROV RUEHTRO
DE RUEHKH #1261 3120625
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 080625Z NOV 09
FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4703
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/CJTF HOA

UNCLAS KHARTOUM 001261

NSC FOR MGA VIN, LETIM
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN
ADDIS ABABA ALSO FOR USAU

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [AU](#) [UNSC](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: WILL THE GOS REVIVE THE SUDAN PEOPLE'S INITIATIVE?

REF: A) KHARTOUM 1166
B) 08 KHARTOUM 1549
C) 08 KHARTOUM 1532

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Sudan People's Initiative (SPI) civil society forum may soon be revived pending approval from the Presidency, SPI Chief Drafter and University of Khartoum Professor Attayeb Hajj Atia told poloff in a meeting on October 26. Revival of long-dormant forum, which in the past produced a series of generally well-received recommendations but no tangible results, is being conceived as mechanism for civil society involvement in the Darfur peace process, he said. This is in large part due to the perceived failure of United Nations-African Union Joint Chief Mediator Djibril Bassole to produce a credible civil society forum in Doha. Atia was guarded in his optimism that a revival of the SPI could help move the peace process forward, however, given the regime's long history of empty promises. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On October 26, poloff met with Professor Attayeb Hajj Atia, Director of the University of Khartoum's Peace Research Institute. A respected academic and sometime critic of the regime, Atia was chosen by President Omar Al Bashir to serve as Chief Drafter of the Sudan People's Initiative civil society forum in Kenana in October 2008 (reftels). He recalled how the SPI's recommendations--on land rights, compensation, the protection of IDPs and so forth--were to be used by the GOS to develop a proposal for political settlement of the Darfur crisis. Following the conclusion of the forum, Atia was granted a headquarters in for the SPI in Khartoum, a modest budget and full time staff of three, but he failed to achieve any political support that would have allowed him to actually implement the forum's recommendations, rendering the SPI impotent.

¶3. (SBU) The lack of political will to use the SPI may have changed now that influential Presidential Advisor Dr. Ghazi Salaheddin is firmly in control of the Darfur file, said Atia. (Note: In an October 22 meeting with CDA Whitehead, Dr. Ghazi declared his intention to revive the SPI. End Note.) According to Atia, other high level GOS officials, including Vice President Ali Osman Taha, are also supportive of reviving the forum. They reason that there are currently no mechanisms for civil society to drive the peace process, he explained, and then dismissed the efforts of Joint Chief Mediator Djibril Bassole. (Note: Since July 2009, members of Bassole's Joint Mediation Support Team (JMST) have told poloffs they plan to hold a civil society conference in Doha, which has yet to materialize. Following an "Experts Panel" discussion in Doha on October 12-14, the JMST now plans to hold civil society consultations in Doha later this month. End Note.)

¶4. (SBU) The SPI has already reconstituted some working level committees, said Atia. He noted he has proposed to reconvene the SPI Presidential Council, the forum's highest ranking body. (Note: The Presidential Council is chaired by President Bashir, key opposition party leaders, and the chairmen of the SPI's eight working committees. End Note.) Atia is still awaiting buy-in from the

President Bashir, however. Atia noted that in recent conversation with Bashir, the President declared that he liked to think of the SPI as a "strategic reserve," noting that he supported the initiative but was waiting for "the right time" to revive it. Atia believes this time will be in the "near future", he said.

¶5. (SBU) The success of a revived SPI hinges on two factors, according to Atia. The first is buy-in and representation from a broad spectrum of Darfurian civil society. He noted that the selection of delegates was bound to cause discord, but that "a reasonable degree of consensus needs to be reached" on who should represent Darfurians. The second requirement, according to Atia, is the successful integration of the Northern opposition parties into the forum. This may prove to be a difficult task, given the perception that the heads of Northern opposition parties, as well as First Vice President Salva Kiir and Assistant to the President Minni Minnawi, were paraded out at the first SPI but saw no results from their participation. "We all got taken for a ride," joked Atia.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: (SBU) While there is a chance a revived SPI may succeed in producing another series of credible recommendations, whether these will actually be implemented is another story. Given the regime's long history of empty promises and hollow spectacles like the SPI, we will wait and see.

WHITEHEAD